1: Ray E-5 (1928-38) 1939 Plateau

SOCIAL CULTURE

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

General Orientation

101 114 174 621

A clear picture of political organization in the Plateau is indispensable to a proper understanding of intra-areal relations in other aspects of culture, and at the same time illuminates important historical problems of inter-areal character. In any general American perspective the cultures of the Pacific slope stand together in contrast to those east of the Cordillera. Kroeber pointed this out many years ago, emphasizing, among other traits, the atomistic nature of political organization in the west:

117 174 621

> From Alaska to California there does not appear to have been a group that could be designated as a political unit, other than what it is usual to call the village; that is, the settlement on one spot. These villages may often have been in a state of neutrality toward each other, or even linked by peaceful trade, inter-marriage, and participation in each other's ceremonies and festivals; but they were linked like nations of the civilized world, whose intercourse, however intimate, friendly, and long enduring, is always as it were in a condition of suspense, because built on nothing more than the occasions of the moment, the states being irreconcilable units.[1]

This separatism is carried to the highest degree by the Indians of northwestern California, where even a village is not looked upon as a political unit, and chiefs are lacking entirely.[2] Such near-anarchy is, however, characteristic of but a small area, and the general coastal pattern of village autonomy must not be looked upon as a negative trait, as might be suggested by this extreme. Indeed, even in northwestern California the condition is in a sense a positive one, with group action achieved through the influence of rich men whose leadership is respected. It is the lack of distinct village unity that sets off northwestern California, rather than the nature of the leadership. Northward throughout the coastal strip, "chieftainship" is correlated with high rank, wealth, and often with sib leadership. But always the village is definitely recognized as the political unit.

This is not a mere matter of passive recognition or acceptance, however. Village autonomy is strongly defended; it is considered right and proper. In 1819 Franchère, the fur trader, wrote of the Lower Chinook,

[1] Kroeber, *Tribes of the Pacific Coast*, p. 396.
[2] Kroeber, *Handbook*, pp. 830–33.

I: Ray E-5 (1928-38) 1939 Plateau

"All of the villages form so many independent sovereignties. . . . Each village has its chief."[3] My own Chinook informants affirmed the existence of village autonomy; they pointed out that able or well-liked village chiefs may exert an influence over other villages but insisted that this extended power is strictly unofficial.

In coastal British Columbia, unilinear descent groups make their appearance and divide the political composition of the village. But the political integrity is maintained, even though any one chief must of necessity be a member of but one lineage. Indeed, the very existence of these sib groups has been attributed by Sapir to the splitting and uniting of villages. The villagers'

> adherence to their respective traditions will be such that neither of the former village communities will give up its peculiar set of privileges, so that a twofold division of the community, as accentuated by these privileges, will persist. If we imagine this process to have occurred several times, we will gradually arrive at a community which is subdivided into several smaller units which we may call septs or bands, or perhaps even clans, each of which has its distinct stock of legendary traditions and privileges exercised by its titled representatives and whose former connection with a definite locality is still remembered.[4]

Despite these disruptions and individualities of tradition, the political unity of the village is maintained.

Murdock points out that Haida chiefs are strictly house or clan officials:

> The clan chief is always also a house chief, usually the richest and most powerful in the village. He holds his position by inheritance and cannot be deposed. His authority depends upon his wealth, personality, and prestige. [However,] where several clans inhabit a village, one of their chiefs may enjoy more prestige than the others, but this is due solely to his superior wealth or social status or to the number and strength of his followers.[5]

Even here, in the face of impressive clan dominance, the village is not lost as a political unit; at least no substitute or larger political unit emerges.

The specialized character of village autonomy on the Pacific slope is further indicated by contrast with conditions on the Asiatic side of Bering Strait. There the small local group is seldom independent; larger

[3] Franchère, *Narrative*, p. 250.
[4] Sapir, *Social Organization*.
[5] Murdock, *The Haidas*, pp. 237 f.

1: Ray E-5 (1928-38) 1939 Plateau

114
174
621

affiliations are emphasized. It cannot be argued, therefore, that western America is merely passive debtor to Siberia.[6]

The wide perspective of the observations above, and the emphasis on the extreme coastal strip, is necessary as a background for discussion of Plateau organization since the latter conforms to the general western political atomism. We may now examine specific Plateau patterns.

Village Autonomy

At the extreme south, Spier found that

101
114
619

> The Klamath are not a single political entity. There are four or possibly five subdivisions or tribelets, each occupying a distinct district, and practically autonomous. . . . The separatism is immediately clear in any discussion with them. They invariably reserve the name Klamath for the Klamath marsh-Williamson river division; all others are Klamath only by extension. The groups are readily defined by the districts they occupy, the names of which they bear; this, despite the lack of any sharp geographic division, such as we should expect to figure in political separatism.[7]

Murdock found similar conditions among the Tenino.

> They were divided into four sub-tribes or rather pairs of villages—one, with rather flimsy and temporary buildings, located on the [Columbia] river and used during the fishing season in the warmer months; the other, with substantial permanent dwellings, located several miles distant, usually away from the river, at a spot which provided water, fuel, and shelter from the winds during the colder half of the year. The four subdivisions [were] originally independent though always friendly.[8]

This unique arrangement of pairs of villages illustrates the depth of the village unit concept and indicates a persistent village allegiance.

Still farther north, among the Sanpoil, the village is equally emphasized in the political sense, but citizenship is less stable.

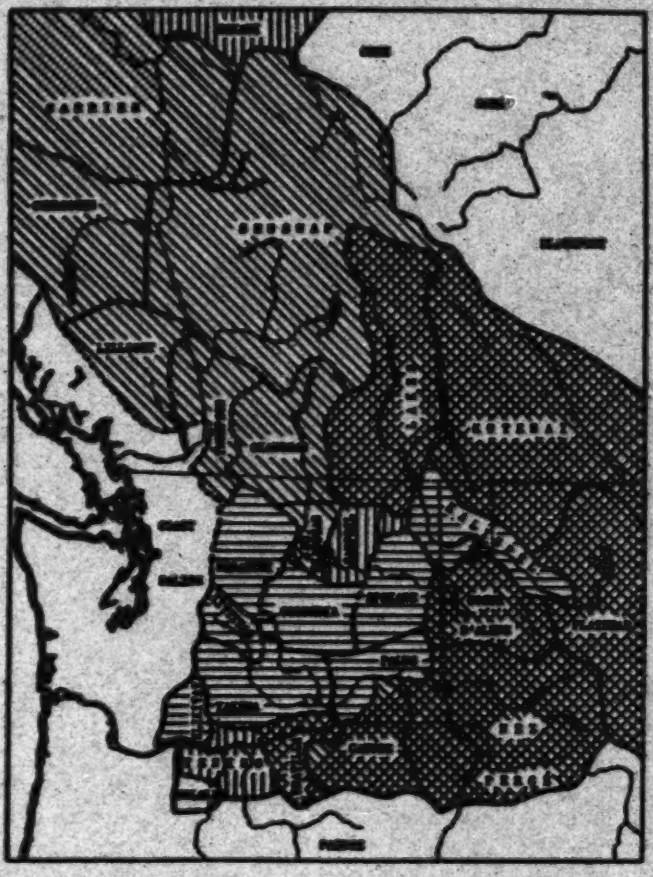
> The Sanpoil political unit was the village. Tribal organization in the ordinary sense was lacking entirely. The inhabitants of a village were known by the name of that village plus the prefix "s" or the suffix "x^{w}", or both. No term existed for any larger political aggregation, but there was a name for the more inclusive dialectic division. The members of each village were subject to their own chiefs and to no others. The chief of one village, no matter how small, answered in no wise to the chief of any other village. In fact one chief seldom

[6] Kroeber, *Tribes of the Pacific Coast*, p. 397.
[7] Spier, *Klamath Ethnography*, pp. 21 f.
[8] Ray and Others, *Tribal Distribution*, p. 396.

1: Ray E-5 (1928-38) 1939 Plateau

village groups often came together to make up a war-party, but there is little evidence of close relationship in village groups in time of peace.

It would be more accurate to say that several villages were united to



Map 2. Types of political organization. Vertical hatching: strict local autonomy; diagonal hatching: small bands of villages; horizontal hatching: local autonomy with slight tribal tendency; cross hatching: tribal organization.

form the tribe, rather than that the tribe was divided. Indeed, mere common action in war is hardly a basis for postulating tribal unity, but Spinden adds:

The council consisted of the chiefs and the old men. There was a village

1: Ray E-5 (1928-38) 1939 Plateau

This last observation is likewise corroborated by Cayuse and Umatilla.

All elements of Plains culture to be found in the Plateau, however, are intimately bound up with the horse complex. Though real enough, the relationship is probably indirect. Intercourse with far distant areas was obviously stimulated by possession of the horse. It would appear, therefore, that possessing the horse, the Indians of the eastern Plateau came into more frequent and intimate contact with Plains tribes and carried home many of the more obvious and impressive elements of Plains culture. One of these was tribal organization. The horse played a further role in this respect. It not only made visits to distant points possible, but greatly amplified intercourse within local areas. Village isolation was eliminated; local problems were dwarfed by regional problems, especially those of warfare and defense. Warfare itself was greatly amplified in frequency and scale.

The chronological problem raised earlier is now partially answered, if these reconstructions be correct. Tribal organization must have arisen subsequent to the acquisition of the horse. Haines places the date for this area at 1730. This corresponds closely to native estimates.

Village, Band, and Tribe

It has been convenient above to use and quote the term "band" without definition. Actually the word is applied in two quite different senses: one, a grouping of villages; two, a mobile or migratory group, usually small, in an area where sedentary life is lacking or little emphasized. In the latter sense the band is strictly analogous to the village so far as theory of organization is concerned. This type of local unit is found exclusively among the Sekani, and to a certain extent among the Carrier, Chilcotin, and Flathead. On the whole, Plateau life involves wintertime occupancy of river villages, and summertime camping at fishing, berrying, and root-digging grounds.

The band which consists of a number of villages is of quite a different order. Two sub-types, differing greatly in basic conception, may be isolated in the Plateau. One is merely the embryonic tribe developing under indirect influence from the Plains. Its most objective marks are common action in war and the recognition of a common war chief. Subjectively it involves a weakly developed national feeling and pride in the strength of unity. Type examples are the Yakima and Klikitat. The tendency is also observable among the Wenatchi, Columbia, Spokane, Palus, and Kalispel.

1: Ray E-5 (1928-38) 1939 Plateau

The second sub-type is characteristic of the western Plateau of Canada (Carrier, Chilcotin, Lillooet, Shuswap, Thompson, Okanogan, Southern Okanogan). Here the band is merely one unit of an expanded autonomous local group. Instead of the tiniest settlements maintaining strict independence, as among the Sanpoil, a small number within a relatively small range join together in a mutually advantageous union. In this case the group is looked upon in the same light as a large village. It is essentially a union of domestic and peacetime order. Chieftanship is central; if a member village needs a measure of strictly local control, the officer is a head-man, not a chief. The group is not looked upon as a union, but as a unit. Even among the Sanpoil the germs of this organization can be seen. Although a village of but two or three houses is theoretically strictly independent, with its own chief and group name, there is some modification of this in practice. Such a settlement sometimes sends representatives to the assembly of the nearest large town and solicits advice from the chief of that town. In such a case the small group does not recognize a chief, but names a head-man. Under this arrangement, however, the actions of the large village are never binding upon the other. Decisions which are thought wise are respected, others ignored.

The Southern Okanogan illustrates well the expanded autonomous local group. Four independent bands are recognized, each with its chief and small local territory. A man moves freely from one village to another within the band. Sharp distinctions are made between one band and another, especially where dialectical differences exist. This is true even within limited areas along the Okanogan River. These distinctions are purely political, however, not social or ethnic.[16] This type of band organization is surely a local development upon an earlier pattern now retained only by the peripheral Tenino, Sekani, and the internally peripheral Sanpoil.

Lines of Demarcation and Territorial Rights

The exactitude with which boundaries are drawn varies greatly, as might be anticipated under the conditions outlined above. Where the village is the political unit boundaries are automatically exact so far as the settlements themselves are concerned, but intervening and tributary territory must be divided arbitrarily, or be used in common. In the typical organization of the Plateau, territorial segmentation is highly

[16] Cline, *Southern Okanogan*, pp. 73 ff.

1: Ray E-5 (1928-38) 1939 Plateau

131
621

specific along river courses, but hunting territory is invariably used in common by a number of villages or small bands. An area may be frequented more or less exclusively by a larger band but this is a matter of convenience rather than principle and does not particularly affect the specificity of boundaries.

The trans-river boundaries are quite precise in all cases. This is more or less inevitable since villages are small and situated close together. The actual line of division is seldom geographically intermediate, but is determined with regard to fishing grounds. Each village is associated with one or more of these grounds, depending upon the size of the village and the productivity of available fishing sites. Permanent villages are located with regard to topography, fuel supply, and winter warmth; therefore fishing sites may or may not be near by. Hunting and gathering grounds, on the other hand, cannot be so neatly parcelled out. It would be naturally impossible for each of many small villages to have a specific hunting territory and yet, whether partially cause or only effect, the political attitudes toward fishing territorial rights and hunting territorial rights differ essentially one from the other, as shown by actual organization.

It must be emphasized at this point that these distinctions and differences are largely formal and structural, not economically functional. A boundary is a conceptual thing, not a physical barrier. Although a particular fishing station "belongs" to a particular village, any friendly person, either acquaintance or stranger, is welcome to use it. But the village with territorial rights over the station is quite definitely the visitor's host. In the use of hunting territory no such host is recognized if the man is a member of the ethnic group; he is simply exercising his right.

These remarks apply to all of the Plateau groups recognizing local autonomy except the Athabascans on the north, particularly the Chilcotin and Sekani. Among these peoples mobile bands replace fixed villages and a considerable territory is required by each. In consequence hunting territory comes to be of primary importance and it is not surprising that each band recognizes specific territorial rights in this respect. Jenness states unequivocally that each of the Sekani bands possesses its own hunting territory.[17] Among the Carrier, large villages often hold specific territory. The mere recognition of such territorial rights is

[17] Jenness, *Sekani Indians*, p. 44.

1: Ray E-5 (1928-38) 1939 Plateau

not antagonistic to Plateau principles, but the exclusiveness with which territory is held is highly atypical. Athabascan groups not only claim nominal title, but are willing to fight to protect their holdings against infringement.

Among Plateau groups recognizing tribal organization there is a tendency toward this rigidness of restriction. The Kutenai and Coeur d'Alêne refuse foreigners the use of their territory, but it must be remembered that all constituent villages have common rights. The Kalispel show only a tendency toward tribal organization, but they require that a visitor from the outside obtain the permission of a chief before hunting within their boundaries. The Yakima carry this notion even further. They insist that such permission be obtained and definitely limit the period of the permit. When the time is elapsed they provide safe convoy for the visitor as far as the Yakima boundary; beyond that point he is upon his own responsibility. Of interest here is the further Yakima practice of stationing scouts at strategic points along the boundary, in the interests of the group as a whole. Thus the lines of demarcation are highly specific here even though the circumscribed area encloses autonomous villages rather than a tribally united people. The adjacent Umatilla and Cayuse tribes treat the Yakima with similar formal hospitality, but give no quarter to their traditional enemies on the south, the Shoshoneans. These southern Plateau groups, together with the Nez Percé and Flathead, maintain tribal or ethnic boundaries on all sides that are quite as specific as the village boundaries on the rivers farther north.[18] The Klamath fall with the central and northern groups, as reflected in Spier's statement,

> The summer camps are rather indiscriminate aggregations of any Klamath, but the winter locations are so fixed of habit as to give a measure of political separatism to the several localities.[19]

Under these conditions it is obvious that the precision with which a boundary line may be indicated is not a function of similar factors in all cases, but may reflect political distinctions either functional or formal, ethnic unity, concordance, or merely geographical conditions.

Chieftainship

In discussing the bases of political organization it has been necessary to refer frequently to the nature of chieftainship. Certain other data will be added here and basic patterns examined.

[18] Ray, *Native Villages*, pp. 17 ff. [19] Spier, *Klamath Ethnography*, p. 11.

1: Ray E-5 (1928-38) 1939 Plateau

influence is observable, while on the east the Plains pattern of rank according to prowess in war has made a distinct impression.

Quite typical coastal class distinctions are present among the Lower Chinook at the mouth of the Columbia River. The Wishram of the Dalles serve as intermediaries between the Lower Chinook and the Plateau in trading activities. It is not surprising, therefore, that they recognize certain vague social distinctions.

> Three classes were recognized in addition to slaves, who stood outside the social structure. While these represented gradations of wealth, they were not primarily such since chiefs were not always among the wealthiest persons, and they in turn were not always chiefs. . . . A lowest class individual was specified as poor, owning no slaves and little of anything else.[38]

To the south, among the Klamath, social stratification is but weakly developed. In contrast to the Wishram, however, chiefs are invariably wealthy. Beyond these there is little difference in wealth from richest to poorest, a condition quite characteristic of the Plateau. Social position is not a matter of heredity.[39]

On the western edge of the Canadian Plateau, there is a certain awareness of class distinctions based upon descent. Among the Lillooet the descendents of chiefs "formed an aristocracy but had no privileges of any kind." But further there exists "a nobility of merit" in which membership is acquired through wealth, wisdom, oratory, and liberality. Men constituting this group are called "chiefs" as well as those belonging to the "nobility of rank." "The hereditary chiefs were looked upon as the real chiefs of communities, even although other men called chiefs might have greater influence and power."[40] This recognition of a loose hereditary nobility is found among the western Lillooet only; it has never reached the easternmost villages, or at least it is denied today. Furthermore, the "chiefs" of this aristocracy are sept chiefs, not political chiefs as such. Teit assumes that the first Lillooet septs were simple village groups. There is reason to believe that the political chiefs of these groups were quite strictly hereditary, as they are among the eastern Lillooet today. This would have provided a fertile base for the growth of sept distinctions under coastal influence. Thus the radical difference between western Lillooet organization and typical Plateau structure appears to be the result of very recent and rather

[38] Spier and Sapir, *Wishram Ethnography*, p. 211. [39] Spier, *Klamath Ethnography*, p. 307.
[40] Teit, *Lillooet Indians*, pp. 254 f.

1: Ray E-5 (1928-38) 1939 Plateau

177
559
565
621

simple reinterpretations. The recency is attested not only by the limited distribution but also by the existence of the "nobility of merit," an anomaly in a class society. This is obviously a concession to persisting Plateau social standards. Teit observes that

> it is quite evident that this clan organization must have a common origin with that of the Coast Salish. . . . We may safely conclude that the clan system was introduced through intercourse with the coast tribes, who, in their turn, seem to have adopted it from their northern neighbors.[a]

This would also be true, by implication, of class distinctions.

Similar conditions exist among the Shuswap. The western groups have recently adopted sept and class organization, while the eastern bulk of the tribe has retained typical Plateau social culture. In this case the period of adoption is very recent and quite definite.

> The organization of the [Fraser] Canyon division, and all of the bands of the Fraser River division north of Dog Creek, was based upon the system obtaining among the Carrier and Chilcotin. By 1850 the Lake division had also adopted this system in nearly all its details, and the Dog Creek band was very much influenced by it. At the same date the Pavilion band had adopted several features of a similar system prevailing among the Lillooet, and the High Bar band was beginning to be influenced by it also. The Indians state explicitly that these customs were introduced through the Canyon division, who had obtained them from the Chilcotin, and through the Soda Creek band, who had adopted them from the Carrier; and in these bands the system had its firmest hold.
>
> The people of these bands were divided into three classes—noblemen, common people, and slaves. The first class were called "chiefs," "chiefs' offspring," or "chiefs' descendents," and constituted in various bands from nearly one-half to over two-thirds of the whole population. In most bands there were few slaves; some of them the property of the nobility, and some that of the common people. The nobles had special privileges, and generally married within their class. Nobility was hereditary, and seems to have descended in both the male and the female line. Women of this class appear to have been on an equality with men, and had in all respects the same rights and privileges. Hereditary chiefs of the bands always belonged to the nobility, but it seems that they tended to become rather chiefs of clans than of bands.[a]

This reconstruction exemplifies well the history and conditions of adoption of coastal class and sept concepts, not only by the Shuswap,

[a] *Idem*, p. 254.
[a] Teit, *Shuswap*, pp. 575 f.

1: Ray E-5 (1928-38) 1939 Plateau

but by the Chilcotin and Carrier as well. The borrowing is in all cases very recent, but somewhat earlier among the Athabascans than the Shuswap. It was in all cases superficial. Deep-seated Plateau standards have been maintained in one way or another. The "nobility" may include two-thirds of the population; a parallel "aristocracy of merit" may permit all men to be in effect upperclassmen; all may hold slaves; slaves are few; women maintain their equality; "special privileges" are said to exist but are hard to find.

It appears unnecessary to go over this same ground for the Chilcotin and Carrier. At least some of the latter never adopted sept organization. But all appear to entertain notions of class, somewhat more fundamental than among the Salish. Morice has indicated the recency of these concepts among the Carrier, while Goldman has ascertained that comparable organization among the Chilcotin is of quite recent adoption.[43] For the Sekani, Jenness provides specific dates:

> When the Sekani were confined to the western side of the Rockies through the hostility of the Beaver and the Cree they impinged continuously against the Gitksan and Carrier Indians, who were organized in the complex manner so characteristic of the Pacific coast. The Sekani not only fought, traded, and intermarried with them, but assimilated many of their customs and tried to adopt their divisions into exogamous matrilinear phratries. . . . The Sekani of McLeod lake . . . quickly abandoned the attempt. . . . The Finlay River Sekani, on the other hand, seem to have been intriguing with the phratric system for nearly a century. . . . They first attempted to establish phratries about 1850.[44]

In contrast to their southern neighbors, however, the adoption of phratries by the Sekani did not involve the adoption of class stratification. Any such concept remains quite foreign to them.

Very different notions of social status are found on the eastern border of the Plateau. From the Kutenai to the Nez Percé a man's war record fixes his social ranking. This record is based upon arbitrary acts, or coups, in typical Plains fashion. Each coup is objectively indicated by a notch on a stick, a mark on a man's white horse, or in some similar fashion. These are displayed as obviously as possible so that all may be made aware and kept aware of one's standing. Furthermore, formal recitation of coups is a common practice upon social occasions. The most significant aspect of this ranking is its relation to chieftain-

[43] Morice, *Canadian Déné*, pp. 201 ff.; Irving Goldman, oral information.
[44] Jenness, *Sekani Indians*, pp. 46 f.